

Applications of Radar Interferometry to Ice Sheet Research

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Satellite radar interferometric data provide large-scale views of the topography and motion of the ice sheets and their associated ice streams and outlet glaciers. Typically, the observed fringe patterns in an interferogram are expressions of both ice motion and ice sheet topography. With a double difference procedure, we were able to separate the field of ice motion and the topography into independent observations. Since the spatial sampling of these fields are comparable to that of the resolution of the imaging radar, the data provide details of topography and motion that have typically been unavailable in the observational literature. The interferometric observations provide only the motion along the line of sight of the radar thus requiring observations from ascending and descending passes to fully resolve the velocity field. This procedure to resolve this vector quantity is illustrated with a time-series of interferometric observations. The interferometrically-derived surface topography have been compared quantitatively with measurements from laser altimeters (AOI) and qualitatively with other imaging sensors. The derived ice motion have been used to compute mass flux of several glaciers using estimates of ice thickness over selected areas. There is a wealth of information in these derived datasets. We demonstrate the geophysical significance of these with examples from the NE Greenland ice stream, the Petermann and the Humboldt Glaciers. We also discuss some of the problems and limitations associated with using the present generation of satellite radars for supporting ice sheet investigations.

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